

The Art of True Apology

by Yana Ludwig, Sol Space Consulting

- 1) Own what you did, said, didn't do or didn't say.
- 2) Recognize the impact your act had on the other person.
- 3) Express sincere regret and apology.
- 4) Offer to make amends in a manner that helps rebalance the relationship.
- 5) Invite the person's feedback.

Example 1: From a work situation:

(Step 1) Jamie, I've been really critical of your work lately, and it seems like it came to a head last week when I replied to your email with a bunch of changes I wanted you to make to the report, and no acknowledgement of the work you'd already done. I know you follow up on my suggestions, so my communication was unnecessarily harsh. When I used the word stupid to describe your framing of the last section of the report, I was being hurtful and unmindful.

(Step 2) I'm seeing how my communication has been really hard for you, to the point where you don't even want to work with me. You care a lot about this work, and my actions have made it unsafe for you to make your contributions. You've withdrawn this last week, and I think that is my fault.

(Step 3) I'm sorry. I've been feeling really sad about this, because I really value your voice in our organization. I obviously need to work on this pattern I have.

(Step 4) I'm wondering if we can spend some time in the next couple weeks backing up and looking at this project through new eyes? I'd like to buy you lunch on Monday and just talk about what is exciting for you about this project, and how I can support you doing the pieces that inspired you to work for us.

(Step 5) If that doesn't sound good, I'm open to your suggestions for what else I could do to restore trust between us.

Example 2: Between members of a car coop:

(Steps 1/2) Ali, Martin just told me that when I got the car back really late on Thursday without calling you, you ended up missing your doctor's appointment that you have had scheduled for three weeks.

(Steps 2/3) I'm really sorry! I know you've been super stressed about your health and really needed to talk to your doctor, and I imagine you were probably pretty angry, and probably wasted a bunch of time getting ready for an appointment you didn't make. I was really sloppy about the time, and I see that had major consequences for you.

(Step 4) I've thought of a few things I can offer to try to make it up to you. Can I make the calls for you to get you another appointment? I know that doctor charges a missed appointment fee, and I think I should cover that for you. I'm also happy to schedule some time with you to talk about your health issues if you need an ear while you are waiting for another appointment. And I'm really, really sorry.

(Step 5) Would some of those ideas work for you?

Tips:

Think about the setting for the apology; try to set it up in a way that will express care for the other person, will feel like a moment that is different from daily life. Make them tea, clean up the kitchen before they arrive, make sure you won't be disturbed, etc.

Do not include excuses or transferring blame to someone else. Background is OK, especially if it includes an insight into something you've learned from the situation about yourself.

Do not expect immediate reciprocation, or even acceptance. If you need some kind of follow-up, set up a time later to receive that. However, if the person does offer it, do your best to be gracious in receiving it (even if it isn't done perfectly). Remember that you only have access to some of the information about the situation, and if you missed something in your own contemplations, you want to hear about that (particularly if it relates to the impact on them that you might not have fully understood).

Conflict Resolution Resources

Here's a short list of places to learn more.

Books and on-line reading:

Non-Violent Communication, by Marshall Rosenberg

Conscious Communication, by Miles Sherts

Sitting in the Fire, Arnie Mindell

Restorative Circles: www.restorativecircles.org/

Laird Schaub's blog: communityandconsensus.blogspot.com has a variety of articles about conflict resolution

Courses and Practices:

Anything that encourages personal growth and self-responsibility, such as:

- Re-evaluation Co-counseling—aka Peer Counseling (www.rc.org)
- Vipassana meditation (www.dhamma.org/)
- The Work (www.thework.com)
- *The Four Commitments*, by Don Miguel Ruiz

Anti-oppression work

- Workshops led by people of color on race, by poor and working class people on class, and by women, trans and non-binary folks on gender are offered in many places, and most organizations could use support in these areas!
- AORTA is a great organization for communities, nonprofits and social change groups
www.aorta.coop

Further relevant workshops with Yana Ludwig include: longer versions of Getting In and Out of Conflict, Building the Skills of Cooperative Culture, (Guerilla) Consensus, and workshops on Racism and Classism in Community (taught with partners). See her website: www.YanaLudwig.net